

# Dragonshards

## Dwarves of the Mror Holds, Part 1

By Keith Baker



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*Gold is the gift of the mountains, but iron comes from blood and bone.*

-- Mror proverb

## Heart and History

The Mror Holds are founded on iron and gold. The Ironroot Mountains hold vast deposits of precious metals and rare ore, and the dwarf lords have used these resources to create a mercantile empire that stretches across Khorvaire. But there is steel beneath the jewels and finery of a Mror dwarf -- the heart of a warrior whose ancestors engaged in constant battle for almost seven thousand years.

Much of the early history of the Mror dwarves is based on fragments passed down through oral tradition and scattered across the clans. It is generally accepted that the dwarves first appeared on Khorvaire approximately twelve thousand years ago, but beyond this, stories differ. Some tales say that the dwarves came from a land of ice and snow, which most modern scholars deem to be the Frostfell -- although to date, those few, brave souls who have explored this frigid land have found no evidence of a dwarven civilization. Others claim that the dwarves rose up from the earth itself, that Kol Korran and Onatar forged them from the stone of the mountains or that Eberron created them to battle the aberrations of Khyber. Every clan and every dwarf has his own opinion, and most are ready to fight with anyone who challenges it.

Regardless of their origin, it is clear that the dwarves were a mighty power long before the present day. Dhakaani dirges speak of battles with the "stonefolk of the mountains," and the Dhakaani were repelled from the Ironroot Mountains by a unified, disciplined dwarvish nation. Even today, scholars observe that Mror battle tactics are ideally suited to counter the traditional techniques used by the Dhakaani and their Darguul descendents.

The dwarves themselves have many tales from this age of glory, though it is difficult to separate fact from myth. Tales speak of Stone Kings and Dragon Keepers, of runesmiths forging mighty blades in the depths. This age came to an end in the reign of Lord Kordran Mror. A number of warriors and heroes had stirred up unrest in the deep realm, and Mror banished twelve of the leaders plus their followers to the surface of the mountains. The depths were sealed off with magical wards and a clan of wardens sent to the lands above to ensure that the seals remained until the others "proved themselves to be worthy of the kingdom below."

The dwarf lords took many steps to prove their worth. It is said that the great stone face of Lord Mror was produced at this time, though this is itself a point of some debate. Korranberg sages claim that the dwarves simply didn't have the skills to produce such an artifact, and argue that they must have sculpted down a larger image. For evidence, they point to obscure references to "the face of Eberron," and suggest that "Dragon Keeper" may have referred to a draconic monument dating back to the dawn of time.

In any case, when none of these efforts produced results, the banished dwarves fell to fighting among themselves. The culture slowly devolved, and while the surface dwarves clung to the secrets of iron, they embraced the grim

joy of battle. For thousands of years the clans fought one another, each seeking to prove its ultimate superiority and earn the keys to the kingdom of stone.

When humans first came to Khorvaire, they ignored the feuding clans of the Ironroot Mountains. The dwarves were too busy fighting one another to take an interest in the world beyond the mountains, and the ancient battles continued unabated until Karrn cast his eyes toward the region. The young prince guessed at the wealth that might be hidden in the mountains, and he wanted his share. With his father's permission, he led an army to subjugate the "mountain barbarians." Though (or perhaps because) they had been fighting for millennia, the dwarves were ill prepared to face an unfamiliar foe. Together the clans could have easily expelled the invader, but Karrn played on their feuds to divide and conquer the clans. Within a decade, the clan lords had bent the knee to the prince of Karrnath.

Having freed the goblins in his conquest of the Five Nations, King Galifar was not about to condone dwarvish slavery. Karrn was instructed to bring the King's Peace to this savage land. The dwarves were forced to stop their warring ways and encouraged to develop a new nation based on the model of Galifar, providing tribute to Karrnath and the old kingdom. The Karrns surveyed the mountains, but they could not pierce the ancient wards, and they drew their conclusions from the veins of ore they could reach.

Decades passed. Many dwarves abandoned their old ways and spread across Khorvaire. Those who remained in the mountains grumbled under the burden of tax and tribute, and slowly their discontent pushed them together.

Then came the summons. The dwarves of Kundarak were the keepers of the wards, and they called the lords of the twelve clans to their hold. In the halls of Korunda Gate the clan lords met in peace, discussed their plans for the nation, and expressed concern about their future in the Kingdom of Galifar. After a few days of talk, the Patriarch of Kundarak led the leaders down beneath the holdfast to one of the ancient wards. "At long last, you have set aside your differences," he said. "Step forward, and open the gate to the kingdom below." As twelve dwarves touched the seal, it faded away, and the path to the past was revealed.

What lay below was a shock to all. While the clan lords battled on the surface of the mountain, the descendants of Mror had fought the Daelkyr in the depths -- and lost. There was no glorious kingdom of noble dwarves awaiting their return, only ruins and shadow, with terrible monsters lurking in the darkness. Ancient treasures remained in these desolate fortresses, and mines still dripped with all manner of ore. Slowly the dwarves reclaimed the ancient fortresses and the fortune hidden below.

Now that its ancient duty was discharged, clan Kundarak -- which had long possessed the Dragonmark of Warding -- was drawn into the greater community of dragonmark houses. With the aid of the Zil gnomes, the dwarves of House Kundarak established themselves as the foremost bankers of Khorvaire. Many of the other clans worked with Kundarak, selling their ores and jewels through the bank or serving as guards and enforcers.

Through all this, the dwarves remained citizens of the crown of Galifar. The dwarves were patient, and most placed great stock in their word and the honor of their ancestors; the clan lords of the past had sworn an oath to Galifar, and it was not the place of their children to break that vow. Even though Karrnath raised taxes, the wealth of the deep mines far outstripped this tribute. Many of the dwarf lords called for rebellion, but the clans could never come to an agreement, and no single clan wanted to act on its own.

Then came the Last War. The dwarves had sworn an oath to Galifar, but that kingdom no longer existed. Never again would the dwarves submit to the rule of a single king, not even a dwarf. They declared the birth of a new nation, a formal alliance of the clans that would one day rival the kingdom of old: The Mror Holds.

**Next:** What it means to be Mror!

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## About the Author

Keith Baker has been an avid fan of **Dungeons & Dragons** since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the world of Eberron to the WotC Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the **Eberron** Campaign Setting and Shadows of the Last War, he has worked for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

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